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ABSTRACT

A Hong Kong program to train secondary school teachers in the use of English as the medium of classroom instruction is reported and discussed. The program provides assistance to teachers accustomed to using mixed code in the classroom and who must use English consistently, and helps English teachers understand how they can support teachers of other subjects in an English-medium instruction (EMI) school. The report first outlines the qualities needed by an EMI instructor, including language proficiency, skills and strategies for teaching through a second language, and attitude and background knowledge that contribute to a commitment to change. It then describes briefly the design and content of the program that helps teachers improve in those areas. Lessons learned in the first year about the adequacy and acceptability of the course to teachers, and consequent course changes, are then examined. It was found that the most important areas needing strengthening are those relating directly to the special role of an immersion teacher in teaching both content and second language. Finally, other forms of support needed and Hong Kong efforts to provide these are noted. (Contains five references.) (MSE)

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HELPING TEACHERS CHANGE THE LANGUAGE OF THE CLASSROOM: LESSONS FROM IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

In September 1994 the Hong Kong Government began implementing major changes to its medium of instruction policy in secondary schools. This policy, if it is carried through, will have far-reaching implications for all levels of education in the territory. In February 1994 the then Institute of Language in Education, now a part of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), began its first full-time in-service course for teachers in secondary schools who use or intend to start using English as the medium of instruction (EMI). This course is the only one of its type in Hong Kong. We are now at the end of the second course. The course is open to teachers of all subjects taught through English, including English as a subject. It provides help to teachers who are accustomed to using mixed code in the classroom and now need to use English consistently. It also helps English teachers consider how they can provide support to teachers of other subjects in an EMI school. The course does not try to persuade teachers or schools to choose English medium education over Chinese medium. It is with

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this course in mind that we are approaching the topic of this paper. Teachers attending the course have also shared their views with us and these are reflected in the paper.

Our purpose, then, is to set out what we have learnt over the past year about the areas in which EMI teachers in Hong Kong need support. We will first outline the most important qualities needed by an EMI teacher. We will then describe briefly how the design and content of the HKIEd course tries to help teachers improve in those areas. We will consider what we have learnt over the past year about the adequacy and acceptability of the course to teachers and discuss the developments that are taking place as a consequence of this. Lastly, we will discuss other forms of support that are needed and the extent to which these are being provided in Hong Kong.

Qualities of English Medium Teachers

1. Language Proficiency.

It comes as no surprise that subject teachers we have worked with believe that an improvement in their language proficiency will lead to the most immediate and significant improvement in their ability to teach through English. Johnson, Shek and Law (1993) mention language proficiency as one of three important qualities needed by such teachers. Swain (1991), in noting the importance of avoiding the mixing of languages in the classroom and the importance of linguistic feedback, implies a considerable level of language proficiency. Bernhardt and Schrier (1992) found "native or near-native fluency in the target language" to be a pre-requisite for immersion teachers in the United States. Teaching through English to students with a restricted command of the language requires the ability to deliver content

that is at the students' cognitive level, through English that is at their language level, at a time when there is a major mismatch between the two. As appropriate teaching materials may not be available then teachers must be able to produce or adapt this content in written as well as in spoken English. The level of proficiency regarded as necessary is a complex and probably controversial matter. Chan (1992), did attempt to specify a level in terms of the language functions teachers need to use in lessons in Hong Kong schools but her framework was never piloted. Johnson, Shek and Law (1993) emphasise the importance of fluency in the classroom, while acknowledging that accuracy is important and "a good target to aim at" (p31).

2. Teaching Skills and Strategies.

The second quality required by EMI teachers is a set of skills and strategies for teaching through a second language. Johnson, Shek and Law (1993) suggest that these are "specific to English medium teaching" (p28). On the other hand, the authors of a useful series of handbooks for immersion teachers produced in Montgomery County, Maryland (Montgomery County, 1989) suggest that these strategies "are similar in nature but differ in intensity and duration from strategies and techniques used by non-immersion teachers". An immersion teacher must accept responsibility for teaching both language and subject content in the same lesson and perhaps at the same time. This requires the control of a range of planning and teaching strategies and skills that put far greater emphasis on language than subject teachers are accustomed to doing without, in the long term, detracting from the attention given to subject knowledge. Teachers must be able, for example, to explain subject content

through English and anticipate language difficulties in content topics. They must provide both language support and opportunities for students' use of English, together with appropriate feedback.

3 Attitude and Background Knowledge.

The third quality, or set of qualities required by teachers who wish to change to the use of English as the medium of instruction is a genuine commitment to the change. The language of instruction in schools is a controversial topic in Hong Kong and elsewhere in the world. There are strongly held views on all sides here and those views, quite rightly, represent political, social and economic priorities as well as educational ones. Teachers are under pressure from the school, from their students some of the time, from Hong Kong society and from educational tradition. Under these circumstances the attitude and commitment of the teachers towards the language policy they are working within is going to be a crucial determiner of their success.

This commitment is made up of several parts. Firstly, English medium teachers must understand the theoretical background for what they are doing in order to be satisfied that it can be effective. Secondly, they must be convinced of the benefits of the change. These benefits may be seen as educational, social, economic or political and individual teachers may prioritise them differently. If teachers question the appropriacy or effectiveness of using English then the temptation to give in to the pressure to switch back to the use of Cantonese and to emphasise the transmission of "key facts" over the use of language to develop understanding of content is likely to become too great. The mixing of English with Cantonese will then increase. The teachers' own doubts will then be confirmed as the

students get inadequate exposure and practice, and can, indeed, only understand and express their understanding of the subject in Cantonese, if at all. Thirdly, the individual teacher must believe that she can implement the changes in her own classroom that will enable students to learn her subject effectively through a second language. This implies confidence in her linguistic ability and her ability to control the classroom skills and strategies described above. Lastly, commitment is only likely to be maintained in the long term if teachers receive the consistent support of colleagues, school management and the educational establishment.

The HKIEd In-service Course for EMI Teachers

Any course that proposes to help teachers to change their classroom behaviour in the way that we have set out to do must address these issues of language proficiency, skills and strategies for implementing English medium teaching, and attitude. Broadly speaking, then, these represent our course objectives. To date we have worked with 84 teachers. If the HKIEd continues to support the course, then numbers are likely to rise substantially. We believe we have learnt a good deal about the real needs of subject teachers and can propose improvements to what we do at the moment. These will be considered in two parts. Firstly, we will briefly outline the chief developments taking place within the current course framework. Secondly we will propose some more substantial changes we feel are needed to make in-service teacher education of this type more appropriate to the needs of teachers. We will finish the paper with some comments on the more general support EMI teachers say they need or which we see as essential to the success of the current transition.

Structure of the Course

Currently, our course is composed of 3 modules: the Medium of Instruction Module (MIM), the Language Improvement Module (LIM) and the Project Module (PM). The 3 modules, running simultaneously, each feeding into and supporting the other two, are designed as an integrated whole in working to achieve the aims of the course; they exemplify the relationship between language and learning. The units in the MIM discuss issues concerning the implementation of EMI and provide input on strategies for effective EMI teaching which teachers have to carry out in their projects. In the LIM, teachers work on various aspects of the English language (e.g. pronunciation, vocabulary development) to improve their proficiency and strengthen their confidence in and capability of using EMI. The PM gives teachers chances to put into practice what they have learnt in the MIM and to use EMI in the classroom. Language improvement also results from the use of English as the formal and informal medium of the course. There is no formal assessment of the language proficiency of teachers on the course. This is impossible at present because, as we have discussed above, we lack a recognised threshold level of English proficiency for EMI teachers. We consider it potentially damaging to the teachers to have any such assessment on the course in the absence of any recognised qualifications for EMI and/or CMI teaching.

Evaluation of the Course and Teachers' Perceptions

The information presented in this section is taken from comprehensive and detailed course evaluations, which have included questionnaires, discussions and informal feedback from course participants, together with the views of academic staff working on the course.

1. Improvement of Language Proficiency

So far, almost all the teachers who have been on the course were able to sustain the use of English in the classroom, though with far from complete accuracy. This was the first challenge presented by their school-based project work, and most met the challenge. In view of the fact that this may have been the first time these teachers had really used English rather than mixed code to teach, it must be considered a success. The experience was also helpful in terms of the confidence they gained. When asked to state 2 things they found most valuable about the projects in the end-of-course evaluation questionnaire, about a quarter of the teachers on the first course mentioned either teaching in English or confidence in using English.

Despite this, many teachers did not believe that their English was good enough to use as a medium of teaching and they consistently expressed worries about being "bad models" to students. The aim of improving teachers' language proficiency was rated as that which was the least successfully achieved. This feeling is backed up by our own observations. Though the course may have helped to boost their confidence, it may not have been as successful in helping to improve their accuracy. A lot of them, for example, could not pronounce some of the content words of their subjects correctly and many had problems with basic language structures. The extent of the difficulties experienced by the teachers with, for example, question forms is worrying (for example, "What this mean?" instead of "What does this mean?").

Teachers are expected to use English at all times during the course for all purposes, both with tutors and among themselves. Though about half of the teachers on the first course considered that their spoken language had improved most, many did not speak English among themselves. They did not feel comfortable doing so. Yet English teachers on similar programmes do so with few reservations. This may imply something about their respective attitudes towards the English language.

The teachers' knowledge about language and the part it plays in the learning of their subjects is also disappointing. When they were required to identify language objectives for teaching, they were only able to identify some very general language structures (for example, the passive voice, past tenses, prepositions) and/or vocabulary. These were frequently not significant for the subject or topic they were teaching. They had no concept of language functions or discourse features at all. There remains, therefore, a real question as to the extent to which they can integrate content and language in teaching their own subjects.

2. Skills and Strategies for EMI Teachers

Teachers did try out, to various extents, the "new" skills and strategies introduced to them on the course in the school-based part of their project work. They took more care to ensure that their own explanations of subject content given in English were at an appropriate language level. They provided more opportunities for their students to use English. Unfortunately there was a general lack of the language support that students needed if they were to produce the language required.

A common area of concern among the teachers was the feasibility of using these skills and strategies when they returned to school because of the time involved in preparation and the lack of support from other colleagues and the school. They did not see themselves as having the "power" to decide on what and how much to teach and, therefore, felt unable to make the necessary reductions in syllabus content in the early stages of using English. In their school-based work, most of them included the same amount of subject content as they usually do in their normal lessons in school. They therefore failed to finish their teaching plans since they were also trying to include more attention to language. The teachers were particularly worried about exams, particularly public exams. If exams do not demand the effective use of language by students, they were not prepared to do so either, however important they may recognise it to be.

3. Language Across the Curriculum Strategies

Teachers on the course were introduced to a range of basic language across the curriculum strategies. These included the use of the same set of classroom language, the same expectation of the level of language production from students, regulating the amount of vocabulary across the subjects for students, and identifying links of content and/or language across subjects. They were also expected to put these into practice in their school-based work. To enable them to do this, a group of 4-6 teachers went to the same school to teach the same class for 3 days. While they each taught their own subject, they were encouraged to integrate the use of English across subjects.

It was, of course, not easy to assess the success of the teachers' efforts in trying out these strategies within just 3 days. However, teachers on the course did discuss at length the feasibility of

implementing them in school. Their concerns were the same as those described in the last section. They expected an increase of workload; they believed that it was impossible to work alone and that there was a need for the whole school to collaborate. But again, they did not believe that they had the power or the ability to persuade their colleagues to cooperate. Some of the teachers did not believe that cross-curricular co-operation on language in learning could be of any value.

4 Relationship between Language and Learning

Despite the fact that more than half of the teachers on the first course gave a rating of 1 or 2 for the extent to which this aim was achieved (on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being fully achieved and 5 not achieved at all), teachers generally had serious problems in trying to integrate language into subject content teaching. Some of them insisted on viewing the roles of subject teachers and English language teachers as distinct. They could not accept any responsibility for teaching or developing and encouraging the use of English in the classroom. Some teachers actually refused to identify language objectives, beyond vocabulary, when planning their projects.

In their evaluation of the course, quite a number of teachers commented that the course should concentrate only on their language improvement, ignoring classroom strategies. They often complained, quite rightly, that there were no subject specialists among tutors on the course and that this compromised the effectiveness of the course. It is certainly true that more subject-specific expertise among course tutors would be useful though at present it is not available. Nonetheless, refusing to admit the importance of language in subject content because it is put forward by language

experts indicates a failure to see the relationship between language and learning which we were seeking.

Directions for Course Development

While recognising the achievements of the course, we are also aware of areas where improvement is needed. Some of these are of an organisational nature and, while they are vital, they are not relevant to this discussion. The most important areas that we must strengthen are those that relate most immediately to the special role of an immersion teacher in teaching a second language and subject content. Some of these areas are at a conceptual level, others at a very practical level.

First, there is the need to develop more subject-specific materials for both the MIM and the LIM units in order to strengthen the teachers' understanding and acceptance of the importance of language and content relationships. The range of materials on grammar and discourse will be extended. We are planning, for example, materials to help teachers with the pronunciation of content terminology of a number of school subjects. The help of subject specialists in these areas will be essential. In order to increase the emphasis placed on individual subjects, the planning, production and school-based work of one project will in future not require cross-curricular collaboration and will be based in the teachers' own schools. We still do not propose to run separate courses for teachers of individual subjects. We plan, also, to provide much more background knowledge of language, which we originally believed might be resented. This will develop a better understanding of the relationship between language and content.

The second area of development is collaboration between the EMI participants and English teachers attending similar in-service programmes in the Institute. We have introduced a sharing session for these teachers so that they could identify areas of mutual support and collaboration. We are now looking into the possibility of integrating some of the units of the two courses to bring about a closer understanding. We hope to raise levels of understanding and co-operation both while the teachers are on course and when they return to their schools.

A last area where we see the need for development of the course is the introduction of formal assessment of language proficiency for teaching purposes of teachers on finishing the course. This is a long-term target and, as has been mentioned, this can only be meaningfully done if there is a similar assessment on pre-service courses.

Support beyond In-service Provision

The in-service course we are currently providing is clearly inadequate as the only or even the chief support for teachers in changing their medium of instruction. The limitations of such programmes are well-known and the number of teachers requiring help is also too large. There is an additional problem. A good many of our teachers, as described by Hoare and Lee in another paper in this conference, are cynical about the commitment of the government to its own medium of instruction policy. They are convinced that, however much they may believe in it and however much better equipped they may be to implement it, they will not be permitted to work in the ways they know to be necessary.

If teachers are to overcome this feeling of helplessness there are five main areas in which they need support. The first of these is teacher education. The further development of in-service provision has already been discussed. A similar commitment at the pre-service stage is equally necessary. New teachers of all subjects must be aware of the differences between teaching through the mother tongue and through a second language. The HKIEd is now starting to make a clear distinction between student-teachers who will qualify to teach through Chinese and through English. This distinction needs to be maintained through the teaching medium of their course, the nature and amount of English language provision, through the work they do in their specialist subject areas and in the assessment of the course. Similar progress is needed from all other institutions engaged in the preparation of new secondary teachers.

Better understanding and support from within schools is essential. Many principals still insist that their schools are English medium but are doing nothing even to understand the implications of this. If they do understand the changes that are needed they are unwilling to face up to them. They are certainly not encouraging teachers to implement change. Where the change is taken more seriously, implementation rarely goes beyond exhortations to use more English. There are schools that are doing more but too few of them. Above all, leadership is required. Properly co-ordinated in-school staff development over a substantial period is essential. A willingness to reconsider textbooks, school examinations and subject autonomy is also needed.

We cannot, however, fail to appreciate the pressure school managements feel they are facing. They, in their turn, need support from the government and the education system, in a form that goes

beyond the pronouncement of a policy and some minimal guidance. This should include a much more concerted attempt to inform parents of the issues. Schools need strong backing and assistance from the Education Department in adapting syllabus content to take account of their chosen medium of instruction. A post of Language across the Curriculum Co-ordinator, with clearly defined responsibilities, authority and training, is required to provide co-ordination in every school, especially over the crucial transitional period. Guidance must be given to publishers in the production of more appropriate subject textbooks. At present, schools seem to have little confidence that the new medium of instruction policy will be seriously supported.

Fourthy, there must be further changes to the examination system, which will demand the use of language to demonstrate an understanding of the subject and not simply to list facts. This process has begun but will have to go much further if it is to influence teaching.

Lastly, much more local research is needed. At present, almost all of the research on which the current approaches are based comes from different education systems, with different languages and, crucially, different educational and social values. While theory transfers across contexts, the nature and implementation of a programme is dependant on the context. We have very little hard information to give teachers about what will work in Hong Kong classrooms and the extent of the changes they must make.

Conclusion

Bringing about classroom change is in large part the responsibility of the classroom teacher. We have tried to show how teachers trying to implement change in their medium of instruction within Hong Kong's language in education policy are being helped through in-service education. We have also indicated some of the problems this has given rise to and how these are being addressed on this course. Lastly, we have briefly described the other forms of support that are essential to teachers if they are to implement the change successfully. While in-service education can be an important contribution it is insufficient on its own. Teachers can be agents of change but only within a professional environment that supports and values their contributions.

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